



Nobel rencontre at the 'Rencontres du Vietnam'. 1992 Physics Nobel Georges Charpak (left) and 1989 Physics Nobel Norman Ramsey (right) with Jean Tran Thanh Van, the driving force behind the meetings, which have sparked considerable physics interest in Vietnam.

calendar. The first meeting, in December 1993, attracted 140 physicists from 23 countries. Last October, the second meeting attracted 230 physicists from 40 countries. Organized in two streams, particle physics and astrophysics, the meeting concentrated on two main themes of current interest. Introductory plenary talks were followed by more detailed parallel sessions. Common seminars emphasized the increasing interplay between these two themes.

The particle physics meeting - Physics at the Frontiers of the Standard Model - reflected emphasis on precision data on the three quark/lepton families. The astrophysics meeting - The Sun and Beyond - covered the continuing study of the Sun as a typical star, and an overview of the composition and evolution of other stars, together with the increasing awareness of the important role played by invisible 'dark matter'.

The presence of world authorities at these meetings and the high scientific standard of presentations helps avoid scientific isolation and provides a useful opportunity to make contacts and even to catalyse scientific collaboration. In this way Vietnamese scientists are able to make research progress without having to become scientific emigrants.

As well as the physics conferences,

two physics schools have also been organized, one on particle physics and the other on advanced silicon technology and its applications to signal treatment. These special schools provide additional contact.

The Second 'Rencontres du Vietnam' received financial support from the European Union through the Cooperation with Third Countries and International Organization, from the French Foreign Ministry, from the US National Science Foundation and from the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, Italy.

The Vietnam Rencontres are the brainchild of Jean Tran Thanh Van, who for many years has also organized the Rencontres de Moriond, which traditionally provide a glimpse of new results before the summer conference season.

VIIETNAM

Preparing the ground

Physicists, unlike the physics they study, cannot operate in a vacuum. The stimulation and exchange of ideas needed for front-line research is difficult in isolated centres in developing countries. The arch example of this is Abdus Salam, who returned to his native Pakistan in 1951 after making his initial field theory contributions at Cambridge. Starved of research stimulation, Salam did not remain in Pakistan for long, and soon returned to Europe, for good, as it turned out.

Another example is the 'Rencontres du Vietnam', now held regularly in Ho Chi Minh City, and an established event on the international physics